

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
DHA-05 /064 W
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R 261635Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6758
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL PALERMO
SECDEF
USMISSION NATO
AMCONSUL TRIESTE
AMCONSUL TURIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IT, GW
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES HOLD HEARINGS ON KAPPLER ESCAPE

REF: A) ROME 13366, B) ROME 13534

SUMMARY: TESTIMONY BY DEFENSE MINISTER LATTANZIO BEFORE
SPECIAL SESSIONS OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE
AND THE CHAMBER THIS WEEK DID NOT REVEAL ANY NEW INFORMATION
ABOUT THE KAPPLER ESCAPE. THOUGH A NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARIANS
EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH LATTANZIO'S EXPLANATION OF
THE INCIDENT, NO PARLIAMENTARY INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE WAS
ESTABLISHED TO CONDUCT FURTHER INQUIRIES. REPUBLICAN
CALLS FOR LATTANZIO'S RESIGNATION HAVE RECEIVED
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LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THE OTHER PARTIES AND THE DEFENSE MINISTER
SEEMS TO BE IN LITTLE DANGER. REPRESENTATIVES OF SOME
OF THE SMALLER LEFTIST PARTIES HAVE NOTED THE RESPONSIBILITY
OF PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS (AND IN PARTICULAR OF
ARNALDO FORLANI, LATTANZIO'S PREDECESSOR AS DEFENSE
MINISTER) FOR MOVING KAPPLER TO THE ROME MILITARY
HOSPITAL AND ALLOWING HIS WIFE UNLIMITED ACCESS. THE

KAPPLER CASE CONTINUES TO DOMINATE NEWS COVERAGE IN ALL ITALIAN MEDIA AND ANTI-GERMAN SENTIMENT RUNS HIGH. END SUMMARY.

1. IN DAY-LONG QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS BEFORE SPECIALLY CONVOKED MEETINGS OF THE DEFENSE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE (AUGUST 23) AND THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES (AUGUST 25) DEFENSE MINISTER LATTANZIO PRODUCED VERY LITTLE NEW INFORMATION REGARDING THE ESCAPE FROM A ROME MILITARY HOSPITAL OF FORMER SS COLONEL HERBERT KAPPLER (SEE REFTELS). LATTANZIO DISCLAIMED ANY PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ESCAPE AND ANNOUNCED THAT EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY THOSE RESPONSIBLE AMONG THE CARABINIERE GUARDS ON DUTY AT THE HOSPITAL AND THEIR OFFICERS WOULD CONTINUE. THOUGH SOME PARLIAMENTARIANS WERE CLEARLY DISSATISFIED WITH LATTANZIO'S RESPONSES, THE SENATE AND CHAMBER COMMITTEES DECIDED AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION TO PURSUE FURTHER INQUIRIES INTO THE INCIDENT AND REQUESTED ONLY THAT LATTANZIO REPORT TO THE TWO DEFENSE COMMITTEES IN MID-SEPTEMBER ON THE PROGRESS OF HIS MINISTRY'S INVESTIGATION OF THE ESCAPE.

2. CALLS FOR LATTANZIO'S RESIGNATION, WHICH WERE LED BY THE PRI (SEE REF B), HAVE RECEIVED LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THE OTHER PARTIES AND IT SEEMS UNLIKELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER WILL BE FORCED TO STEP DOWN. ON AUGUST 25 RADICAL DEPUTY MARCO PANELLA AND SOCIALIST CHAMBER DEFENSE COMMITTEE MEMBER FABRIZIO CICCHITTO DENOUNCED EFFORTS TO PLACE "POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY" ON LATTANZIO AND STATED THAT THE REAL BLAME LAY WITH THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT AND, IN PARTICULAR, WITH LATTANZIO'S PREDECESSOR, ARNALDO FORLANI (THE CURRENT FOREIGN MINISTER). COMMENT: IT WAS FORLANI WHO APPROVED KAPPLER'S TRANSFER FROM GAETA PRISON TO THE ROME MILITARY HOSPITAL IN 1976 AND ORDERED THAT MRS. KAPPLER BE ALLOWED FREE ACCESS TO HER HUSBAND. FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT FORLANI, MINDFUL OF HIS OWN INVOLVEMENT IN THE AFFAIR, PRESSED THE WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT HARD FOR AN EARLY STATEMENT CONDEMNING THE ESCAPE AND EXPRESSING SYMPATHY WITH THE ITALIAN POSITION. END COMMENT.

3. THE KAPPLER CASE CONTINUES TO DOMINATE ALL MEDIA NEWS COVERAGE IN ITALY AND ANTI-GERMAN SENTIMENT IS EVIDENT. PARLIAMENTARIANS HAVE EXPRESSED DISPLEASURE WITH THE ATTITUDE OF WEST GERMAN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS AND ON AUGUST 25 PCI DEPUTY ALESSANDRO NATTA

VOICED THE COMPLAINT OF NEARLY ALL THE PARTIES, INCLUDING THE DC, WHEN HE CHARACTERIZED THE STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE WEST GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTRY EXPRESSING SYMPATHY FOR THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS OF KAPPLER'S CRIMES AS "TOO LITTLE". A SERIES OF DEMONSTRATIONS PROTESTING THE ESCAPE AND THE WEST GERMAN RESPONSE HAS BEGUN AND IS SCHEDULED TO BE REPEATED IN MOST MAJOR ITALIAN CITIES OVER THE NEXT MONTH. SEVERAL ITALIAN NEWS WEEKLIES HAVE RUN STORIES ABOUT THE KAPPLER ESCAPE JUXTAPOSED WITH FEATURE STORIES ABOUT THE IGNORANCE OF GERMAN YOUTH ABOUT THEIR COUNTRY'S RECENT PAST AND THE RISE OF NEO-FASCIST GROUPS IN GERMANY. COMMENT: INTEREST IN THE KAPPLER CASE SHOWS NO SIGNS OF FLAGGING HERE. AT LEAST PART OF THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE FACT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT DURING THE AUGUST LULL THERE IS LITTLE OTHER NEWS TO REPORT, AND THE RECOMMENCEMENT OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY IN SEPTEMBER MAY PUSH THE KAPPLER AFFAIR TO THE BACK PAGES. HOWEVER, THE DEPTH OF ITALIAN RESENTMENT AND INDIGNATION AT KAPPLER'S SUCCESSFUL FLIGHT AND WEST GERMANY'S HALF-HEARTED RESPONSE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. IF, AS EXPECTED, WEST GERMAN COURTS RULE THAT KAPPLER CANNOT BE EXTRADITED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE INCIDENT COULD PLACE SIGNIFICANT STRAIN ON ROME-BONN RELATIONS FOR SOME TIME TO COME, REGARDLESS OF THE WISHES OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT.HOLMES

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